

Barth Society met in Chicago November 16-17, 2012

Our meeting in **Chicago** in conjunction with the AAR featured a Friday afternoon session from 3:15 P.M. to 6:15 P.M. and a Saturday morning session from 9:15 A.M. to 12:15 P.M. The presenters for the Friday afternoon session were Katherine Sonderegger, Virginia Theological Seminary, whose lecture was entitled: “*Barth and the Divine Perfections*” and Paul Dafydd Jones, University of Virginia, whose lecture was entitled: “*Divine and Human Patience*”. George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary presided. The Saturday morning session featured a *Discussion* of two books: 1) David Haddorff, St. John’s University, *Christian Ethics as Witness: Barth’s Ethics for a World at Risk* (Wipf and Stock, 2011) and 2) Gerald P. McKenny, University of Notre Dame, *The Analogy of Grace: Karl Barth’s Moral Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2010). Arne Rasmussen, Umea University, Sweden, responded to David Haddorff’s book, and Paul T. Nimmo, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK responded to Gerald McKenny’s book. George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary presided.

The Eighth Annual Barth Conference will be held at Princeton Theological Seminary June 16-19, 2013. This Conference is entitled: “*Karl Barth in Dialogue: Encounters with Major Figures*” and is co-sponsored by *The Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary* and the *Karl Barth Society of North America*.

For full Details and Registration, the Conference website is: <http://www.ptsem.edu/barthconference>

What follows are summaries and some brief recaps of the lectures from the meeting in Chicago.

“Barth and the Divine Perfections”

Katherine Sonderegger

**Virginia Theological Seminary,
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Katherine Sonderegger began her lecture noting that Colin Gunton had prepared the way for her discussion with some provocative assertions. First, he maintained that Christians have *univocal* and not merely analogical knowledge of God and his attributes. He did not hesitate to claim that we may apply “our creaturely concepts to God’s own Reality” in a way that made it seem as though this might never have been said quite this way before. But in fact, according to Sonderegger, this had been said before by Karl Barth in *CD II/1*; hence she suggested that perhaps Gunton was the “true and fearless descendant of his teacher, Karl Barth”.

Sonderegger noted that in Colin Gunton’s *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes*, he held that the *via negativa* was basically a form of unbelief that attempted to know God prior to and in a way that bypassed God’s own enabling us to know him through Jesus Christ as empowered by the Holy Spirit. Because of the Incarnation, he believed that some *univocal* language for God is not only licensed but required. Gunton thought the whole program of analogy proceeded in just the same way as the *via negativa*—attempting to know God prior to and apart from God’s own presence and revelation in his Word and Spirit. Gunton’s analysis of this *via negativa* she observed was based on the idea that the Christian Doctrine of God and our knowledge of God had been entrapped by a false metaphysics and that this assumption is taken by many to be crucial to Barth’s own *Church Dogmatics* such that his thinking is indeed “anti-metaphysical”.

This anti-metaphysical stance Sonderegger pointed out was not new to Barth. Protestant academic theology

was decidedly anti-metaphysical in its modern form eschewing speculative understanding in the post Kantian age and turning instead toward the living experience of faith. Barth's own thinking was marked by a distaste for the God of the philosophers, one who was conceptualized as lifeless, static and silent, even imprisoned in his own simplicity and unicity. In his treatment of the divine attributes Barth did not want philosophy but only revelation to dictate the meaning of God's being, nature and essence especially when considering eternity and omnipotence. The question then is: did Barth in fact reject "hellinism" in a way that finally transformed the doctrine of the divine attributes into something else entirely?

Sonderegger went on to say that her task in this presentation was to propose a possible way to construct "one coherent doctrine of the Divine Perfections" out of what is offered by these two theologians. Before reading *CD II/1*, Sonderegger mentioned that she believed that Barth embraced analogy and rejected univocal predication, embracing his famous *analogia fidei*. In *I/1* and in *II/1* we hear refrains that stress the creature's incapacity for God conceptually and really and the gift of true knowledge of God that comes from the grace of God himself in Jesus Christ. In his Catholic interlocutors Barth encountered a doctrine of analogy that was shaped by the debate over natural knowledge of God and his view that the doctrine of justification implied the need for grace and faith. Barth knew well the thinking of Pryzwara and Gottlieb Söhngen and he also did not believe that the Roman Catholic magisterium would accept without reserve Söhngen's view of the *analogia fidei* because according to the *analogia entis* it must be possible to know God apart from his revelation since being "comprehends both him and us". Sonderegger concludes that there may have been a turn to analogy in Barth's dogmatics, but it is not the doctrine of analogy many assume.

Barth does not directly attack the *analogia entis* because in his view there is no common ground between it and the analogy of faith that allows such a response. Instead he offers a radically different approach. Instead of arguing that acts follow being such that God's being could be known apart from his act in Christ, Barth insisted that "Being follows act". Barth is after an analogy that has its validation as created by the "work and action of God Himself, the analogy which has its actuality from God and from God alone, and therefore in faith and in faith alone". Theological epistemology, then, must conform to Luther's justification by faith alone and by grace alone.

While Barth certainly was familiar with the usual analogical terms such as equivocity, univocity and proportionality, he instead used the word "similarity" and spoke of "disparity" and "parity" noting that neither of these could apply to our knowledge of God. There is nothing that our language has in common with God, the creator and Lord. For Barth, similarity has to refer to something quite different from our ordinary use of terms. But it is at this point that Barth's thinking displays ambiguity, according to Sonderegger. On the one hand, Barth claims that there is similarity between our language and God's being. But on the other hand, God has to act in specific circumstances for this to happen and this can only happen when we obey God's own revelation. In scholastic and Aristotelian circles this offering might be considered little more than "a lofty description of equivocal predication". Yet this is exactly what Barth himself denies.

Focusing on Quenstedt, Barth maintains that even though they may seem to be saying the same thing they are not because Quenstedt offered a view of analogy that attributed knowledge of God intrinsically to creatures thus compromising the doctrine of justification. Because Barth applies the doctrine of justification to knowledge of God he advances an active rather than a static view of analogy.

At this point the question about where we stand with regard to univocal predication must be answered. Has Barth offered a complex and nuanced answer with his view of analogy? It seems that because he has applied the doctrine of justification to his view of similarity Barth simply has turned the doctrine of analogy into Christology—it is nothing other than "the living Name, Jesus Christ". According to Sonderegger, "epistemology follows and is determined by metaphysics" so that similarity in this context must mean to be God with us as *event*—revelation "tells this history, this One Life".

This can be seen in the way Barth describes God's righteousness, for instance: "God does not have to, but He can, take to Himself the suffering of another in such a way that in doing so, in founding and accomplishing this fellowship, He does what corresponds to His worth" (*CD II/1*, 377). In other words, God's mercy is not in conflict with his righteousness; God simply is merciful in his righteousness. Barth here adopts a version of distributive justice that is more muted in the doctrine of Reconciliation. In Sonderegger's view, the doctrine of justification presented in *II/1* both mirrors and differs from the "four-fold Doctrine of Christ's atoning work in *CD IV/1*. In *CD II/1* the incarnate Son experiences God's wrath in order to make satisfaction

to God's righteousness and even to express that righteousness as the form of God's mercy.

Here Barth says things about the divine perfections with which Colin Gunton would agree. Hence, "God bore the conflict between man and Himself, as it had to be borne, to the bitter end, *as it affected Himself as the injured party* [a remarkable statement] and man as the violator of His glory. His mercy consists in the fact that He took this conflict to heart, indeed, that *He bore it in His Heart . . . for in Him who took our place God's own heart beat on our side*, in our flesh and blood, in complete solidarity with our nature and constitution, at the very point where we ourselves confront Him, guilty before God" (CD II/1, 402). Here, according to Sonderegger, we have Barth's correlate to Rahner's statement that "the Immanent Trinity *is* the Economic": Jesus Christ simply *is* the divine perfection of justice in his own person and this applies also to our knowledge of God's own heart.

Here it is argued that there is no language of veiling and unveiling, no dialectical tension and indeed no appeal to analogy "properly conceived". At this point Barth's own aversion to nominalism and semi-nominalism prevents him from relying on "any of the safeguards the tradition has stored up in these two methodological structures". Instead he appeals to confession of Christ's personal work and to him "who just *is* the dying and living and victorious merciful righteousness of God". Does this mean Gunton is right after all and that we must speak *univocally* about God and God's attributes? Here, while they seem to be saying the same thing, in reality they are not because for Gunton Barth's careful reflections on similarity as analogy cannot find a corresponding echo on our side. In its place we have univocal knowledge of the Trinity. But for Barth "similarity" is the "place-holder" for God's dynamic "assumption of our creaturely words into God's own interior 'colloquy'". It is not any epistemology at all but the living Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ.

In Sonderegger's judgment then Barth here has platonized the doctrine of the divine attributes by making all epistemic categories metaphysical. Thus truth and likeness become personal since Christ himself simply is the "similarity" that comes from God and "commandeers" our terms. So is Barth offering a univocal view of God with us? According to Sonderegger, the answer must be yes and no. To describe God's personal work in Jesus Christ is to describe univocally this God who is with us. But since we are unable to say Jesus Christ directly, we cannot "ourselves enter into the Mystery, the Hiddenness that is the Incarnate union of God and humanity". Hence

our creaturely terms such as righteousness, mercy and the like "mean what we mean when we speak them, but that is so only because God has come among us to simply be our righteousness and to work for us Divine mercy". This then is Barth's "univocal equivocality" because the similarity Barth intends is Jesus Christ himself.

*"Divine and human patience:
Thinking with and after Barth"*

Paul Dafydd Jones

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Jones's lecture proceeded in three steps.

First, he offered a close reading of a neglected section in *Church Dogmatics* II/1, wherein Barth considers patience as a divine "perfection." Having noted precedents in the patristic, medieval, and modern periods, and having offered some remarks about Barth's general approach to God's perfections, Jones argued that Barth's account of patience turns on three connected claims. First, that patience underscores the graciousness of God's providential rule, given that creatures are given the space and time needed to respond to God's sovereign command; second, that patience aptly highlights God's merciful restraint from judgment; and, third, that Jesus Christ is divine patience incarnate. This last point received especial emphasis, for it marks a point at which Barth's Christology, his understanding of atonement, his theological anthropology, and his doctrine of creation converge. Since God's wrath has been realized against sin, on the cross, and given that Christ's obedience to the Father is the condition of possibility for genuine human action, it is possible to say that God "opens" history in such a way that human agency has meaning and consequence.

With this analysis to hand, Jones then suggested that Barth's treatment of patience in *Church Dogmatics* II/1 can be used as interpretative key for reading later parts of the text. *Church Dogmatics* III/1, for instance, identifies a fulfilled covenant as the condition of possibility for creation's time and space; it can be read as an exegetical examination of patience at the moment in which "legendary" pre-history becomes history proper. Barth's reflections on the time "allotted" to each human in *Church Dogmatics* III/2, Jones then suggested, amount to an intensification and development of the connection between God's providential exercise of patience and Christ's person as patience incarnate. Inasmuch as Christ ensures that each human being has the time and space to respond

freely to God, Christ's futurity amounts to the sharp demand that each human being take up her assigned role in the Kingdom. So it is that God's patience awaits a *disanalogous* response. What ought we *not* do? We ought not to keep God waiting; we ought not to try God's patience, presuming to give God what God does *not* need (namely, time and space). What *ought* we to do? We ought to recognize the "importance of the Now" (III/2, 532) and hurry, ecclesially and therefore politically, to meet the coming Christ, the sovereign and personal future towards which we are being moved. God's grace, in fact, is such that a claim floated in *Church Dogmatics* II/1 is dramatically reprised in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1. God's patience is so profound that God is now *holding history open*, persisting with the provision of time and space until the moment, at long last, that God hears "a human *answer*, a human *Yes*...a voice of *human thanks* from the depths of the word reconciled with him" (IV/1, 737 rev.).

Third and finally, Jones offered a constructive expansion of Barth's perspective — albeit one that Barth himself would likely not approve. Having suggested that Barth's view of patience allows for a theological anthropology that involves *human* "being-in-becoming" (Jüngel), Jones wondered whether this construal of human existence might dovetail with anti-essentialist accounts of the self. Specifically, Jones proposed that scholars explore the possibility that Barth's insights, creatively stretched, might lend dogmatic support to queer theological projects that encourage individuals and communities to cast aside restrictive construals of sex and gender, in order that they might embrace, by the grace of God, innovative ways of becoming and being human.

At the Saturday morning session two books were considered: 1) **Gerald P. McKenny, University of Notre Dame, *The Analogy of Grace: Karl Barth's Moral Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2010)** and 2) **David Haddorff, St. John's University, *Christian Ethics as Witness: Barth's Ethics for a World at Risk* (Wipf and Stock, 2011).** **Paul T. Nimmo, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK** discussed McKenny's book and **Arne Rasmussen, Umea University, Sweden,** commented on David Haddorff's book.

What follows will be a summary of Paul T. Nimmo's discussion along with an invited response from Gerald McKenny. This will be followed by a brief note on

Arne Rasmussen's comments together with an invited response from David Haddorff.

Paul T. Nimmo, University of Edinburgh

Paul T. Nimmo began by expressing his appreciation for McKenny's significant work on Barth's theological ethics. After introducing the work itself, noting that *The Analogy of Grace* is a book "with real breadth to its scholarship and a real depth to its reflections," Nimmo stressed that it was a book that required care by readers.

McKenny's desire in the book was to introduce readers to Barth's moral theology "in all its strangeness" leading them to appreciate its importance for Christian ethics today. It is refreshing, Nimmo noted, that while McKenny proposed to cover the major themes of Barth's moral theology, he also noted that he would not cover certain aspects of that thinking in detail, such as the Christian life, the political dimension, the full breadth of primary and secondary literature, the wider ethical and philosophical themes and the ecclesial locus of Christian ethical thought and practice.

After summarizing the introduction which sees Barth's ethics grounded in his doctrine of election, it was noted that McKenny properly emphasized "the profoundly Christological form and content of this theological ethics". Here the many themes discussed in the book were introduced: the inseparability of dogmatics and ethics, the encounter of God with humanity, the relationship of Gospel and Law and the nature of the divine command.

From here Nimmo summarized the chapters. Chapter One discusses Barth's thinking in the period between his dialectical break with liberal theology and his general ethics in II/2, noting that in McKenny's view there was a striking continuity in Barth's approach which stressed that God's righteousness called into question human righteousness and that the former was the basis of human hope. Barth attempted to move beyond the ethics of Luther and Calvin. Yet there was development as well since for Barth there was a conceptual shift which saw divine righteousness more as the fulfillment of human moral achievement in Jesus Christ than as the interruption of human moral achievement.

In Chapter Two, there is a discussion of "Barth's Moral Theology and Modern Ethics" in the context of Barth's relationship to modernity. While Barth appropriated much from modern ethics, Barth opposed

the autonomy and interiority of modern ethics. McKenny's achievement was to see Barth's Christological focus as crucial and to realize that "Barth accepts modernity's deepest desire . . . yet . . . rejects its own understanding of that desire".

The Third Chapter offers a detailed discussion of the relation between Dogmatics and Ethics. Nimmo once again noted McKenny's perceptive analysis, stressing that dogmatics is ethics since both are constituted by and witness to the Word of grace which is indeed the Word of command as well. That discloses the difference between theological and general ethics while it also expresses a clear "coincidence" of Barth's ethics with general ethics so that while philosophical ethics is seen to be valid, it is only so "to the extent that it can be comprehended under the ethics of the command of God".

Chapter Four discusses the divine claim upon humanity and thus offers a detailed discussion of Barth's view of the Law as the form of the Gospel and the Gospel as the content of the Law. The Christological emphasis was in view once again in that Jesus Christ is the one who accomplishes the good for us so that the good confronts us as a demand to be what we are now free to be and not as something that we still need to accomplish by ourselves. Nimmo notes that McKenny ends his thorough discussion saying that Barth's thinking here offers hope to us in our moral lives but "risks denying that our moral striving has any ultimate consequence".

In Chapter Five, McKenny discusses the proper place of ethical agency so that there is a definite place for human ethical action in Barth's thinking. According to McKenny, the concept of *correspondence* between human and divine action plays a key role since it "combines our affirmation of grace, our imitation of grace, and our witness to grace". The form of human participation in grace is paradigmatically expressed in gratitude. Also considered here is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life since it is the Holy Spirit who enables proper human action to be "taken up into God's own action, yet without ceasing to be human". Still, McKenny expressed an unease with Barth's "denial of sacramental mystery and corresponding hesitation in affirming the visibility of human goodness".

The Sixth Chapter (the longest) discusses ethical reflection and instruction. How does human ethical thinking "participate in the divine judgement, choice and decision without asserting itself over and against God"? For McKenny there is a paradox in Barth's thinking here: ethical reflection is affirmed but is seen

as insufficient. Casuistry is also discussed noting that insofar as Barth affirms a general norm and personal communication his thinking is in harmony with casuistry. But Barth rejects casuistry because it leaves us responsible to general norms instead of God's command. McKenny rejected the idea that Barth's conception of the divine command was "simply occasionalist or voluntarist" because his thinking was focused on the covenant—all ethics are "always related to the history of the covenant of grace". According to Nimmo, McKenny "subjects Barth's attempt to derive ethical guidelines and frameworks and his employment of the concept of the 'boundary case' to careful critique". This was followed by a "sustained critical analysis of Barth's view of ethical reflection and instruction". McKenny concludes that there is an arbitrary aspect "to hearing the command of God" and some inconsistency in his handling the boundary cases as well as an inadequacy to Barth's handling of the virtues as well as an unnecessary "dichotomising between Barth's 'prophetic ethos' and casuistic ethics".

In spite of the criticisms he offered, McKenny ends the book expressing appreciation for the innovation and lasting significance of Barth's moral theology. His thinking offers "a viable alternative to the Augustinian tradition" and in this way Barth makes a permanent contribution to the universal church "however strange the voice in which he has spoken".

Nimmo considered the book a pleasure to read and asserted that the book is always appreciative yet critical but that it never descends into "hagiography or polemic". It is a "model of serious and engaged research on the work of Karl Barth".

While Nimmo noted that those places which McKenny said he would not treat in detail could leave readers desiring more, he also mentioned that there was sufficient material in the book to command attention. Nimmo then offered three critical assessments of the book focused on 1) "the transparency of the divine command"; 2) the intersubjectivity of the command of God"; and 3) "theological ontology".

1) While Nimmo acknowledges the importance of McKenny's treatment of the divine command, he also claims there is a danger that McKenny might have overlooked what has sometimes been called the "perspicuity of the Word of God . . . in its specific aspect as Law". In other words, Nimmo thinks McKenny did not adequately treat and discuss the places in Barth's thought where Barth stressed the specificity of the divine command in

every circumstance. Nonetheless, Nimmo himself says one is left uneasy because Barth's own emphases do not seem to mesh smoothly with the ethical positions presented by McKenny and this may suggest need for further study since there might be a problem with the coherence of Barth's own position on this matter.

- 2) Nimmo points out differences in the English and German translations of *CD III/4*, 9 which suggest that if the English translation were correct then McKenny's case regarding the specificity of the divine command would be strengthened because in English it is said that "it may well be the case—and will always be so—that . . . here and now the command of God must be proclaimed by one man to another who must hear it through him". The German however [*"und es wird immer wieder so sein"* (*KD III/4*, 8)] should read "and will again and again" and therefore cannot be understood to imply that personal communication has any necessity or monopoly here. That would explain why Barth held that there are elements of truth in casuistry while making no attempt to bring it to bear on his whole treatment of ethics as McKenny does. It would also give a better view of Barth's understanding of the Law and Gospel. This would not undercut McKenny's judgment that Barth's ethics is not individualistic. But it might call into question the way McKenny treats a series of binary opposites: "Spirit or prophetic voice on the one hand and legal code on the other hand . . . divine presence and absence . . . command vs. law; even vs. text; (prophetic) risk vs. (casuistical method or technique". This conceptualization may not fully capture Barth's view.
- 3) Because McKenny paid careful attention to the connection between dogmatics and ethics, Nimmo observed that he also duly considered the doctrines of God, Christology, election and theological anthropology. Nimmo noted that there was a pervasive, if implicit, theological ontology "which underlies Barth's moral theology as a whole". On the one hand McKenny demonstrated his awareness that Barth's moral theology is closely related to his doctrine of election which means that election is fulfilled in Christ himself. On the other hand McKenny attempts to solve his view of a conceptual difficulty in the relationship between the Law and Gospel by claiming that this might "require us to read the incarnation back into the eternal divine determination". McKenny himself does not propose this view. But while he does call

attention to the "momentous issues that are at stake here", McKenny's interpretation of Barth at this point is more traditional. Nimmo wishes he had pursued such questions further and refers to his own discussions in his chapter in *Commanding Grace: Studies in Karl Barth's Ethics*, ed. Daniel Migliore (Eerdmans, 2010). Nimmo calls attention to the fact that McKenny offers a proper view of grace in Barth's ethical thought. But he thinks McKenny may have missed a nuance in Barth's thought. For Barth the grace of God in Jesus Christ is always "new, strange, and free" (IV/1, 84). McKenny's idea that Barth's moral theology leaves room for a "growth in grace" seems in conflict with Barth's idea. Also, while McKenny clearly and correctly indicated how Barth's view of justification and sanctification moved far beyond the Reformation views, Nimmo said he regretted that McKenny did not follow his discussion of this by a discussion of vocation in Barth's thought to show how Barth's actualistic ontology led him in this direction.

Paul Nimmo concluded his remarks by praising McKenny's work once again and by indicating that while McKenny was warmly appreciative of Barth's theology, though not endorsing it outright, this might be a positive indication that Barth's ethical work might find additional support in the academy of ethics at large. Also, the fact that this important work was undertaken at a Roman Catholic institution suggests that there is an ongoing reception of Barth's work in Catholic circles. This suggests the possibility of theologians and ethicists working together "across ecclesiastical divides". Finally, Nimmo expressed his approval that the Barth Society was open to this type of discussion and thanked George Hunsinger, Gerald McKenny and David Haddorff for making this possible.

Gerald McKenny, University of Notre Dame Response to Paul T. Nimmo In his own words

I am grateful to the Karl Barth Society of North America and in particular to Professor George Hunsinger and Professor Paul Molnar for this opportunity to respond to Paul Nimmo's consideration of the *The Analogy of Grace*. I am also grateful to Dr. Nimmo for his lucid and accurate overview of the book and for his thoughtful and challenging criticisms. It is an honor to receive this careful and critical attention from the author of *Being in Action*, a study of Barth's ethics for which I have the highest regard.

Nimmo directs three criticisms against *The Analogy of Grace*. My response to the first criticism, which concerns human knowledge of what God commands, will defend the position I took in the book, while my response to the second criticism, which concerns the intersubjective character of God's commanding, will result in a retraction of my position accompanied by a description of the problem that led me to that position. A third set of criticisms is grouped by Nimmo under the heading of "theological ontology." An adequate response to those criticisms is not possible in the time allotted to me, so I regret that it will have to be deferred to another occasion.

Nimmo's two major criticisms go to the heart of my understanding of the command of God in Barth's theology. His first criticism targets my claim that according to Barth there is no concrete and specific knowledge of the command of God. Nimmo adduces several quotes from *CD II/2* in support of the contrary view that, for Barth, we do or at least can have such knowledge of God's command. I concede that my discussions of this matter in the book were not as precise as they might have been, so I will try now to clarify the senses in which for Barth we do and do not know what God commands.

First, all but one of the quotes Nimmo adduces in criticism of my position do not have to do with our knowledge of God's command but instead make the point that God's command is addressed to us not as a general or indeterminate norm, which is then left to us to specify, but rather as a fully specified command. The reason why, for Barth, God's command comes fully specified is that the command is not merely an expression of God's will but is God's decision on the moral character of our concrete actions (*CD II/2*, 631). If it were addressed to us as a general norm and not as a fully specified command, then it would be we, and not God, who decide what that norm requires in our particular circumstances and would thereby decide on the moral character of our actions. Why would that be a problem? It is important for Barth to hold that it is God who decides the moral character of our actions because of the relationship between the command of God and election (which is the context in which *CD II/2* presents the command of God): To decide that an action is right or good or obedient is to decide that it fulfills our determination by God to be God's covenant partner. In other words, it is to decide that this action satisfies the claim God makes on us as God's elect. For Barth, this is quite obviously a decision that God alone is in a position to make.

Second, the question for Barth in light of this specificity of God's command is how we should

approach our own decision for or against a proposed action or course of action knowing that it is the command of God (and not we) that decides on its character as good or evil, obedient or disobedient. One way to approach our decision is to presume that we are capable of arriving at knowledge of God's decision on the character of our action. But as Barth asserts, this is to presume that we know the command of God just as God knows it, namely, as one who is able and authorized to decide what counts as fulfilling our determination as God's elect. In his words, "Our decisions would then run parallel to God's decision, and to that extent identical with it" (*CD II/2*, 644). To presume to know God's command in this sense is to repeat the sin of Adam and Eve, who desired to know and judge good and evil as God does. Barth consistently uses the term *wissen* and its cognates to refer to this problematic presumption or desire to know God's command in this way, namely, as the capability and authority to decide what counts as fulfilling our determination as God's elect.

However, we might approach our own decision in a very different way, namely, by asking after God's command rather than presuming that we are capable of arriving at it on our own. "We must ask what the command of God is, and what we are to do, without having an answer ready and being able to furnish it ourselves" (*CD II/2*, 645). In this activity of asking, Barth recognizes a legitimate sense in which we know God's command. According to this sense, which is consistently designated by the word *kennen* and its cognates, we know God's command as that which we must ask of God. More precisely, it is in the very act of asking after God's command that we may be said to know that command: "... in the very fact that we ask we will receive the knowledge of God's command; in the very fact that we desire this knowledge, what we are and will and do and do not do will be directed by the command of God ..." (*CD II/2*, 648f.). Thus, "Those who ask after it already know it" (*CD II/2*, 653).

These rather cryptic remarks are not isolated but are repeated in similar form throughout Barth's consideration of the ethical question, "what should we do?," which is of central importance for the issue at hand. What is clear is that knowledge of God's specific command cannot be abstracted from the activity of asking after it. For Barth, asking after the concrete command of God is not like asking after an oracle which we hear and then walk away, securely possessing the knowledge we sought. Barth's chief point is precisely that we never leave off the activity of asking God, which is to say that ethical reflection is a perpetual practice of prayer. As such, it is also clear

that asking is the activity that corresponds to God's determination of us as God's covenant partners and is therefore itself obedience to God's command. "When we ask concerning it," Barth says, "we implicitly obey it" (*CD* II/2, 645).

However, what is not clear is what exactly we know of God's command in our activity of asking after it. Why would Barth, who is fully capable of making something clear or explicit when he wishes to do so, leave such an important matter as this one so vague? The reason, I think, has to do with the inseparability of the act and the person in Barth's anthropology (following from his doctrine of God and Christology). The decision of God's command on the character of our action is at the same time, and inseparably, a decision on *us*. As Barth puts it, the command "not only subjects him to a requirement, but in so doing, places him under a conclusion. It not only demands that he should make a decision in conformity with it, but as it does so, ... it expresses a decision about man" (*CD* II/2, 631). To know the fully specified command of God is therefore not merely to know that the action we are considering is a good or obedient action but also to know that we have fulfilled our determination as God's elect in the performance of it. And for Barth, of course, only God knows us and our action in this sense.

What I am prepared to conclude from this all-too-brief survey of the issue is that at no point, for Barth, may anyone confidently say, "I know that God has ordered me to do *x*," where *x* is the fully specified act that corresponds to the fully specified command. Rather, what one knows, strictly speaking, is that one must be in the position of the one who asks after God's command, and that as one remains in this position one may inquire in the confidence that one is indeed being directed by that command to a good or obedient action. Of course, as Barth will go on to argue in the opening pages of *CD* III/4, we may know a good deal indeed about God's command—to the point that the ideal case of a complete knowledge of the "spheres" (or "domains") in which God commands would give us a close approximation to the fully specified command. But Barth insists that with this knowledge we still fall short of knowing (*wissen*) the concrete, fully specified command of God, which we can know (*kennen*) only as something we must ask for and hear from God.

Nimmo's second criticism questions my claim that for Barth the command of God is always given from one person to another. He argues that a key passage in *CD* III/4, where Barth asserts his agreement with the intersubjective character of casuistic ethics, supports

my view only if we accept a mistranslation of a crucial phrase, and he also observes that Barth makes no systematic use of the position I attribute to him. The short response to this criticism is that Nimmo is right: Barth does not hold the position I attributed to him, and I am grateful to him for pointing it out. I should have considered the unlikelyhood that Barth would restrict the freedom of God in the way my claim does. I also should have considered that Barth treats occasions of ethical decision (most obviously, some cases of suicide) when either one is inevitably alone or the intervention of others would be inappropriate. But most of all I should have considered that most of the discussions in *CD* III/4 of what is required of those who face a *Grenzfall* or boundary case—the points where Barth most clearly draws on casuistry—make no reference to an intersubjective context (the case of abortion is an exception) and in some cases imply, quite to the contrary, that the one faced with such a decision is at least in a literal sense alone before God.

Why, then, did I insist on an intersubjective context for the hearing of the command of God? My case did not rest on the translation error Nimmo points out; rather, I took my cue from the major premise of the passage in question, which reads: "The individual with his actions is not an atom in empty space, but a man among his fellows, not left to himself in cases of conscience nor in a position to leave others to themselves" (*CD* III/4, 9). The inseparability of the individual from her fellow human beings that is asserted in this statement is a fundamental and persistent theme of Barth's theology, and it seemed unlikely to me that it would fail to hold at the very point where the command of God is actually given and heard. I was encouraged in this view by a passage in *CD* II/2 where Barth is discussing ethical reflection or deliberation. He writes, "I have to answer for myself, but before the judgment seat at which the secrets of all our hearts must be disclosed. I go forward to the decision [of God] whether I am good or bad, yet I never do so alone, but always in the midst of a great company. Even in the necessary testing of my conduct [before God] I cannot overlook or forget the fact that I am never alone, and never will be" (*CD* II/2, 655).

This strong description of human solidarity under God's command struck me as a paradigmatic description of human beings as covenant partners under the command of God. However, this description is used by Barth to make a somewhat technical point, namely, that to ask the concrete ethical question "what should we do?" is, properly speaking, to ask after a command that is valid unconditionally: that is, a command that while addressed to me in all my personal

circumstances is not rendered valid by its adequacy to these circumstances. It follows that I do not legitimately ask after the command of God if I suppose from the outset that it must conform to the exceptional features of my situation. Therefore, it is in principle a command that is valid for everyone and not one that addresses me (or my group) as a special case. "That the universally valid command of God applies to me and affects me in a very definite way cannot be taken to imply that I can treat it as conditioned by the peculiar factors of my personal situation; that I can secure and fortify myself against its universal validity as it certainly applies to me too" (*CD II/2*, 656). When I properly ask after God's command, therefore, I treat my particular circumstances as potentially anyone's. Barth therefore ascribes to the command of God the formal universality of Kant's formula of universal law: while God's concrete command is always specified to my personal circumstances its validity is independent of these individuating features, so that in principle the command given to me is given to everyone.

This passage caused me considerable difficulty. It is, first, not clear how a fully specified concrete command can have universal validity. (For Kant, it is maxims, not commands, which are tested to determine whether they can be willed as universal laws.) But more to the present point is that for Barth the command, as fully specified, is in fact given only to me, while the purely formal universality it involves is capable of constituting only an abstract community. In other words, Barth seems in this crucial passage to leave us with the moral subject of much liberal theory: a radical individual who is at the same time a member of a purely formal universal community. The solidarity he attributes to the person who stands before God's judgment seat, goes forward to God's decision, and tests her conduct ("I am never alone and never will be") seems to dissolve between these two poles. Yet Barth nevertheless insists that the question "what should we do?" constitutes us as covenant partners: "This *we* of the ethical question is not an unqualified *we* but the highly qualified *we* of those who ... are elected in Jesus Christ to be covenant-partners with God and therefore placed under the divine command" (*CD II/2*, 656). To ask the ethical question in the solidarity of covenant partnership seems to involve an intersubjective bond that is lacking in the combination of individuality with formal universality.¹ So it

seemed to me that Barth must have meant in *CD III/4* to present the case of conscience as the concrete instance in which the question "what should we do?" is posed in genuine solidarity with our fellow covenant partners.²

With this background in mind, allow me to repeat the major premise of the passage in *CD III/4*: "The individual with his actions is not an atom in empty space, but a man among his fellows, not left to himself in cases of conscience nor in a position to leave others to themselves." This sentence seemed to me to express precisely the covenant solidarity that had dissolved between the poles of radical individuality and formal universality. I therefore concluded that what Barth had in mind is a procedure in which, at least in principle, one always hears the command from another, though never without testing before God what one hears from the other. If this were the case, Barth's position would be fully consistent. As formally universal, the command I receive is in principle given to everyone, so it can be heard from potentially anyone, and as it is given to me as one among my fellows, it comes to me, at least in principle, not merely in its formal universality but in the solidarity of the covenant, and thus from another person. However, I was mistaken.

Where does my concession to Nimmo's criticism leave me? I could try to argue that the command of God is *in principle* always given through another, even when the person who hears it is *in fact* by herself, pleading that Barth's unambiguous rejection of "an attempted humanity in which the fellow-man has no constitutive function" (*CD III/2*, 231) must surely not fail in the very encounter with God in which God's command is given and heard. I could then try to account for points in *CD III/4* where Barth seems to regard the hearer of the command as alone before God by ascribing them to the necessary activity of testing before God what one hears from another (an activity that Barth quite clearly describes as occurring between the individual moral agent and God). I believe that an argument along these lines would show Barth's position to be both consistent and plausible. However, I cannot claim that Barth himself made such an argument, nor can I derive such an argument from the relevant texts without reading it into them. I must therefore concede Nimmo's point that these texts do not support my claim and conclude that while it is

Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, translated by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

² I also considered this judgment to be supported by Barth's analysis of "the basic form of humanity" in *CD III/2* where Barth identifies our being with our fellow humans as the most fundamental feature of our creaturely being (*CD III/2*, 226-31).

¹ This distinction between intersubjectivity on the one hand, and the combination of individuality and formal universality, on the other hand, recalls Jürgen Habermas's argument for discourse ethics against what he described as the "methodological solipsism" of Kant's moral theory. See

reasonably clear how God's command in Barth's theology constitutes the human moral subject in relation to her divine covenant partner, it is not clear how it constitutes her in relation to her fellow human covenant partner.

I will conclude where I began, by thanking the Karl Barth Society of North America, Professors Hunsinger and Molnar, and Dr. Nimmo, and by following these words of gratitude with a word of regret that I cannot do justice to the many other points Dr. Nimmo has made. I can only hope that in my response I have made proper use of the freedom within limitation granted me by Professor Paul Molnar's invitation to include these remarks in this Newsletter.

Arne Rasmusson praised David Haddorff's book, noting that it was ambitious, clear and well-written and that it was a very good and interesting book that he would highly recommend. During his discussion of the book he spent most of his time raising questions to Barth's own thinking from the perspective of neuroscience and psychology with a view to asking Haddorff if his presentation of Barth could incorporate this perspective on these issues into his own thinking. He raised questions about Barth's own attitudes to war and whether or not Barth himself was consistent in applying the thinking he advanced for Switzerland to the rest of the world. He did not think that Haddorff's dialectical accounts of these matters in his book surmounted the objections to Barth's own thinking that he identified.

David Haddorff, St. John's University

Response to Arne Rasmusson et. al.

In his own words

In my book, *Christian Ethics as Witness: Barth's Ethics for a World at Risk*, my principle task was twofold: 1) to provide a summary of Barth's ethics, particularly in light of his theology of "witness"; and 2) to explore how Barth's ethics—as witness—critically engages other voices and events of our contemporary social and cultural situation. It is this second theme that reviewers often highlight in their comments. For example, Paul Brazier says: "David Haddorff has produced what is probably the deepest analysis of Barth's ethics—in the context of a contemporary worldview. This is a synthesis of social theory with Barth's moral theology grounded in the thought and action issuing from God's grace" [*Heythrop Journal* 53 (2012): 722]. Along similar lines, Paul Nimmo, in his forthcoming review in *Studies in Christian Ethics* writes: "[T]he volume of material covered in this book is substantial, covering a

vast range of sources and commentators and engaging in a huge variety of conversations and controversies. That Haddorff is able to attempt this task, let alone accomplish it with both competent assurance and creative flair, is deeply impressive." Both Brazier and Nimmo stress the book's central focus is more than a description of Barth's ethics; it engages Barth as the primary interlocutor in determining how Christian ethics remains an ongoing task of Christian witness. In so doing, it provides an opening for others to enter into the broader discussion about ethical responsibility in our postmodern age of global risk. The book, therefore, is conversational; it's a dialogue rather than a monologue. In his final summation, Nimmo says that my book "draws Barth's ethics into a series of new conversations both in academia and society." Nimmo expands on this point by saying:

"[I]n respect to the first, it will be for social theorists and philosophical ethicists to respond in detail to the kinds of questions and charges that Haddorff's work raises, and for Haddorff and others to determine and to continue to determine which 'parables of the kingdom' from other realms of academic activity might legitimately be embraced by a theological ethics after Barth. In respect of the second, it will be for Christian ethicists to consider and to continue to consider more fully how the lessons of Barth's ethics might engage with the issues—whether political, economic, environmental, or beyond—confronting society at global and local levels in the present day. What Haddorff's work has achieved, however, is to advance the kind of constructive reception of and advance upon Barth's ethics which will undoubtedly sustain further interest in the topic in the seasons ahead. His work is both unceasingly realistic and relentlessly hopeful, and is a welcome addition to the field."

These "new conversations" of bringing together Barth studies with academia and society, generally speaking, provide the 4-part organization of the book, which moves from Barth's earliest to his latest writings. The first 2 sections (chapters 1–5) demonstrate why theological ethics provides the basis for Christian ethics, and the last two sections (chapters 6–13) lay out the basic features of why and how Christian witness provides the framework for Christian ethics. The first chapter discusses the central characteristics of a modern theological ethics, whereas chapter 2 discusses the shift toward postmodernity, by looking at Barth's early thought, especially his 1928–31 *Ethics* lectures. Chapter 3 continues this descriptive narrative of Barth's practical ethics, as situated within the German struggle with Nazism in the 1930s. In part two (chapters 4–5) the subject shifts from theological to social and ethical analysis within postmodern

society. Here I look at both “deconstructionist” (postmodern) and “reflexive” (late-modern) thought regarding social theory (chapter 4) and ethical theory (chapter 5). Although these chapters remain descriptors of postmodern secular thought, the more fundamental task is critically relating this secular content to theological ethics, and why Barth’s thought is helpful in addressing these problems that emerge from the various intellectual crises of postmodernity.

In part three (chapters 6–9), the focus shifts entirely to Barth’s theology and ethics considering the entirety of his work, including the *Church Dogmatics*. In chapter six, the focus is mainly on *CD* II/2 and III/4, exploring how Christian witness begins with theological ethics rooted in God’s action, and how a Christological framework redefining moral agency according to the human-divine action in Jesus Christ remains a helpful way to link Christian witness and ethics. As such, this makes the divine command a command of grace (not law), which practically speaking, makes the command open-ended and dialectical. This dialectical approach says Yes to responsible actions of witness and No to the lordless powers that threaten to undermine human freedom. This Yes/No dialectic, as developed in *CD* IV/1-4 (including *The Christian Life*), is the subject of the following two chapters, as chapter 7 explores the Yes of moral judgment from the standpoint of responsible witness, and chapter 8 discusses how Christian witness involves saying No against the lordless powers of leviathan, mammon, and ideology. In chapter 9, the focus becomes more ecclesiological, in that it relates Christian witness, as the task of church, to public ethics, arguing for a dialectical movement (following Barth’s ecclesiology) between the extremes of ecclesial isolationism (exclusivism) and secular accommodationism (inclusivism). The final section (chapters 10–13) moves from theory to practice in demonstrating how Christian witness becomes ethics in political, economic, and environmental practice. Chapter 10 looks at the subject of Christian responsibility within the context of three spheres of action, namely the interpersonal, the ecclesial, and the world (or social). The dialectic now shifts from a Yes-No relation to a Yes-No-Yes development. This development begins with the divine reconciling action of God in the threefold actions of Jesus Christ (Yes), which provides the basis for the twofold Christian witness against the lordless powers (No) and for responsible actions of faith, hope, and love (Yes), which then provides an opening for the practice of various “goods” that contribute to greater peace, freedom, and justice. In chapter 11 the central discussion focuses on political ethics. For this we turn to the narrative in *CD* IV/1, where Christ as the Son of God and “high priest” exposes the human

sin of pride, the source of leviathan’s power, and overcomes it with faith, thereby providing his disciples with the means for a resisting witness of faith. Standing against leviathan, the church’s witness of faith affirms the practice of peace, which leads to supporting constitutional democracy under law, peacemaking, and global cooperation. In chapter 12, the shift moves toward economic ethics. To begin, we see in *CD* IV/2 how Christ as Son of Man, “royal man,” and “exalted king” discloses the human sin of sloth, the source of mammon’s power, while overcoming it with love, thereby providing his disciples with the means for resisting witness of love. So against mammon stands love which shapes the practice of justice, which supports global “social market” (not free market) economic reform and development, the practice of humane work, and global economic cooperation. Lastly, chapter 13 shifts toward environmental ethics. In *CD* IV/3, Barth explains how Christ as Prophet, the “true witness” who brings together into his one person divine and human agency as “high priest” and “royal man,” discloses the sin of falsehood (or deception), (the source of ideology’s power) and overcomes it with hope, thereby providing his disciples with the means for resisting witness of hope. Ideology today has many faces, but none more important than the common belief that “there is no alternative” (TINA). This ideology gets at the heart of the crisis of postmodern apathy and despair. In the face of environmental destruction and commoditization, the witness of hope says Yes to freedom by supporting global environmental stewardship, technological reform, and ecological sustainability. An ethics of environmental witness is most deeply discovered in God’s covenant-partnership with humanity and the world.

Most commentators single out the last three chapters of the book as the most creative part of the book. For example, in his review A. J. Cocksworth says: “In three chapters, Haddorff insightfully and ambitiously reads Barth’s treatment of the lordless powers (leviathan, mammon, and ideology) through his threefold account of sin (pride, sloth, and falsehood), and then finds each at the root of a concrete ethical issue (politics, economics, environment). This leads to the constructive claim that the key ethical motives in the doctrine of reconciliation (faith, love, and hope) counter the rebellion of sin, the lordless powers and provide a way of responding to current political, economic, and environmental issues” [*Expository Times* 124 (2012): 45]. Alexander Massman noted that “Haddorff’s contemporary Barthianism is not about human transformation of the world, but instead about the church’s witness to Christ’s agency in the world. In a creative helpful argument Haddorff says that

Christ's true witness unmasks the hegemonic ideology that there is no alternative" [*Journal of Theological Studies* (2012): 810]. In these last three chapters, my central task was to work within the logic of Barth's ethics of reconciliation as developed in *CD* IV/1-4, in relation to our contemporary political, economic, and environmental problems. Those reviewers familiar with Barth's theology, particularly the organizational scheme in *CD* IV/1-4, could see my principle intention at work, that is, how the organization of chapters 11-13 follow Barth's own theological logic.

What about criticisms of the book? The most substantive and interesting criticism has focused on issues in ethical methodology and my interpretation of Barth's understanding of the divine command. Paul Nimmo raises some important questions about the specificity of God's command:

"More significant, perhaps, is the unwillingness of the author to interpret Barth at face value in respect of the latter's repeated affirmations throughout his work of the concrete specificity of the divine command. Haddorff denies that the divine command is a 'moral imperative' (209) or a 'situational moral imperative' (250) and posits that the divine command 'does not give us knowledge or content about one specific course of action' (250). Though this view makes life easier in terms of constructing a robust account of Christian moral judgment, and though it echoes a number of recent Roman Catholic interpretations of Barth, it is far from clear that it is sustainable as a fair reading of Barth."

I appreciate Nimmo's comments because this issue remains one of the most interesting and challenging parts of Barth's ethics. My response comes partially from ideas developed in my book, and partially from new reflections. Like many areas of Barth's theology, his understanding of the divine command develops throughout the *Church Dogmatics*. Although he presents a formal (rather abstract) treatment of the subject in *CD* II/2, the details are developed further in later sections of the *CD*, such as in his ethics of creation and reconciliation, as well as in Barth's occasional social and political writings. In approaching this question, I'm not sure what Nimmo means when he says that I'm "unwilling" to interpret Barth at "face value," in his affirmations of the "concrete specificity of the divine command." This simply invites the question: how does Nimmo understand the "concrete specificity" of the divine command? By stating that the command is neither a "moral imperative" nor a "situational moral imperative," I'm not denying that the command is a demand given to us by God's gracious decision within a concrete

situation. I never deny that the command is an "imperative"—a call for action—that demands our response and action in concrete situations. But what kind of "imperative" is this that comes to us in its "concrete specificity"? In *CD* II/2, where Barth speaks most directly to this question, he contrasts the concrete specificity of God's command to the casuistic methods of using general principles in moral reasoning. So, for example, he says God's command comes to us with "specific content" and it "does not need any interpretation, for even to the smallest details it is self-interpreting" (*CD* II/2, 665). But what does this mean? In distinguishing his position from Kant's categorical imperative, Barth clarifies that this command is not an abstract concept or ethical idea, principle or rule; rather it is an imperative rooted in the indicative of *who* God is as gracious commander. This argument that the divine command is relational and trinitarian, goes back to his earlier *Ethics* lectures, but is further developed in *CD* II/2. "To hear the command of God means then, first and decisively, to hear that God is our God, and that we are His Israel, His Church" (*CD* II/2, 735). So if the indicative (who) comes before the imperative (what), then what is the *form* of the command? Barth explicitly says: "The form by which the command of God is distinguished from all other commands, the special form which is its secret even in the guise of another command, consists in the fact that it is *permission*—the *granting* of a very definite *freedom*" (*CD* II/2, 585). God's command permits or invites persons to act as responsible witnesses, within the covenant-partnership of the trinitarian God, to the world around them. "As the divine permission is given to us, it is not the confirmation of a permission that we have given ourselves, or obtained or secured elsewhere." Rather, says Barth, it is an "imperative" that "orders us to be free" (*CD* II/2, 593, 588). This "imperative of freedom" emerges with God's initiating invitation to act as a responsible witness to Jesus Christ, who is the "true witness." "To obey God's command is to accept this invitation to live as those who belong to Him, and therefore to rejoice as we stand in fellowship with this One who has been judged" (*CD* II/2, 738). So God's command is not an imperative to act alone, but to act in such a way that we are included in God's purposes. In short, the divine command is a command of grace to act as a responsible witness to God's purposes. "God wills to take him into His service, to commission him for a share of His own work. He wills to make him a witness of Jesus Christ and therefore a witness to His own glory" (*CD* II/2, 510). Christian ethics, thus, is a witness to God's command of grace, grounded in God's election of humanity in Jesus Christ, to act in responsible freedom.

Does Barth provide more details about the “concrete specificity” of the command? In *CD II/2* Barth discusses how the “definite event” of the command involves the tasks of listening, testing, and acting, thus opening up space for more listening, testing, and acting. This is why, Barth says, the question “What ought we to do?” makes the presupposition of the testing of our conduct a responsibility” (*CD II/2*, 659). Responsible witness involves the risk of testing our actions. The testing of one’s moral actions invites corresponding human and divine moral judgment, which opens up the space or distance between God and us, which is then filled by God’s gracious command of freedom or permission to act as responsible witnesses. One of the reasons Barth rejects casuistry is that this process closes off the space between God and humanity, thus closes off God’s judgment from our actions. Hearing God’s command as witness implies the freedom to learn and test our actions, and at the same time, to listen and act again, knowing that God’s grace will sustain one’s actions and efforts in being a responsible witness to God’s gracious command. How do we learn to prepare for the “concrete specificity” of this testing? Later in *CD III* and *IV*, Barth continues to probe the “concrete specificity” of the command as a form of responsible witness. Here Barth presumes that in order to test one’s actions one needs instruction about what to do. So in *CD III/4* he shifts toward the “instructional or pedagogical” task of ethics, and how this task of “special ethics” provides the background for the task of testing one’s moral judgments and actions. It is in Barth’s “ethics of creation” (*CD III/4*), where he argues that “special ethics” or practical ethics, serves primarily a pedagogical, or instructional purpose, rather than a casuistic method for determining right courses of action.

Special ethics may thus serve as an instructional preparation for the ethical event. And as such instruction it will be plainly distinguished not only from all casuistry but also from an ethics which is satisfied with a formless reference to the God who claims, decides and judges in the ethical event, to the Holy Spirit, or the “command of the hour” and such like. But everything depends on whether anything can be known about the horizontal, the permanence, continuity and constancy of the divine command and human action. On this basis special ethics can become a formed reference to the ethical event and therefore perform its service as instructional preparation (*CD III/4*: 18).

Barth clearly intends to show that the task of Christian ethics, which depends entirely upon God’s command, is neither casuistry nor an occasionalist “command of

the hour,” but a task to depend upon the “permanence, continuity and constancy of the divine command and human action.” So the “concrete specificity” of God’s command, which always remains a command of grace, affirms the “instructional preparation for the ethical event.” One prepares for the event by learning from “instruction,” namely from the authoritative sources of Scripture, creeds and confessions, historical theology, and the contemporary Christian community as well as one’s own personal reflection on one’s past actions. There is a “constancy” and “concreteness” of the command, which implies that it is the sustaining freedom (constancy) in our relationship with God that gives the freedom to address each situation afresh (concreteness). The parameters of this relationship make the task of ethical reasoning neither completely definite nor completely indefinite; it is neither rigidly closed nor completely open-ended. This pedagogical task provides the narrative framework for testing, which forms the parameters of moral judgment and possible courses of moral action. Christian ethics cannot logically tell us with absolute certainty what God’s command is prior to the “definite event” in which we are called to act, but neither is it irrelevant for the tasks of moral deliberation and action within the “definite event” of the command. Instructional preparation for the ethical event prepares for the testing that comes from our decisions and actions that we must do, as God’s command of grace draws us forward toward greater opportunities for responsible witness.

What about other criticisms of the book? In his comments at the Karl Barth Society meeting in Chicago, Arne Rasmusson chose to concentrate on two issues about which he disagrees with Barth. In so doing, the central thrust of his comments was directed more at Barth, than at my particular interpretation of Barth’s theology and ethics. Nonetheless, these comments require a reply. Rasmusson’s first point is that Barth has an overly rationalistic account of ethics, one that fails to acknowledge how bodily and social existence shapes the moral self. By placing the soul over the body, Barth also places reason and judgment over affection, intuition, and desire. So Rasmusson claims that Barth’s anthropology lacks an adequate theory of social embodiment, which then seems to rule out something like ecclesial practices in moral formation. This argument reflects the viewpoint espoused by other critics of Barth’s ethics, particularly those theologians who desire to ground their ethics in ecclesial practices or virtues rather than God’s command. In my book, I do focus at length on these trends of ecclesial ethics and Radical Orthodoxy, so there is no need, in these comments, to elaborate further. Nevertheless, Rasmusson raises an interesting

question, when he asks: “Can you have Christologically-based understanding of the Christian life that integrates a more plausible understanding of moral psychology?” This question asks what sources as “secular parables” can be utilized or commandeered by the Word of God? Rasmusson admits that one of the central tasks of my book was to “eavesdrop” and engage in conversation with these “secular parables,” particularly critical social theory. Yet, in the book, I distinguish between descriptive and normative ethics. In *CD II/2*, Barth acknowledges this distinction, when he says, on one hand, that “curiosity” assists us in the “pursuit of knowledge” in ethics, yet, on the other, curiosity becomes “misguided only when it refuses to recognize any limits to its investigation,” or “when it tries to identify its own enquires with ethical questions, to pretend that it is itself ethics” (*CD II/2*, 658). If moral psychology is seeking to establish a “more plausible” account of the moral agent, then it is also making normative claims about ethical knowledge. This claim eliminates the divine-human agency in Jesus Christ by separating the human from the divine, which further eliminates the objective covenant-partnership between God and humanity. At this point moral psychology no longer becomes a secular parable but an alternative truth claim, which seeks to make normative anti-Christological claims about human nature.

The second issue, directed more at my book, is Rasmusson’s critical comments about Barth’s political thought, particularly his views on the state and war. Rasmusson claims:

“More generally, there is a huge disjunction between the thrust of his theological account and his practical reflection. On the one side he [Barth] defends practical pacifism as the normal path for Christian discipleship, on the other hand his discussion of possible exceptions so much qualified the main line of his argument that the latter loses most of its content. His practical imagination is shaped by established semi-national churches, his own Switzerland, and World War II. This disjunction between his central theological account and his practical reasoning helps explain why his thinking of war has been used for radically different positions. What is lacking is a display of the sort of church life and practices it presupposes. This is true whether we emphasize the pacifist main argument or develop his thought in the direction of the just war tradition area and both pacifism and just war require, for example, communal practices, perpetual training, and virtues that Barth’s and Haddorff’s overly intellectual account of the moral subject doesn’t allow for. I don’t think referring

to a dialectical reasoning helps here, it only furthers the mystification.”

Overall, Rasmusson’s comments provide a good summary of criticism often applied to Barth’s political theology. Is there a “huge disjunction” between his political ethics, as developed in the *Church Dogmatics*, and his other writings or speeches emerging out his own practical reflection? My response is that there is a distinction between his theological and practical ethics, but no “huge disjunction.” In my book, I distinguish between these two sets of writings in two different places, with a discussion of Barth’s own life and practical political thought in chapter 3, and discussion of political ethics, including the topics of democracy, war and peacemaking, and international cooperation in chapter 11. Unlike Rasmusson, I don’t see a disjunction between his discussion of war and practical pacifism in *CD III/4* and *IV/2*, and various political essays before, during, and after World War II. Throughout Barth’s political writings, which always remain contextual, there is a consistent dialectical movement that expresses the twofold witness of Yes and No, that is, a witness of No against the lordless powers, and the Yes for responsible action for the good of others, the church, and the world. That is, from 1914-1950s, from World War I to the Cold War, Barth’s practical ethics consistently challenged the ideologies of totalitarianism, nationalism, and militarism, while also affirming a positive Christian witness of justice, freedom, and peace. In this way, I disagree with Rasmusson’s statement that Barth’s “practical imagination is established by semi-national churches, his own Switzerland, and World War II.” There is no doubt that Barth was shaped by the events of his time, but his political theology also transcends his own concrete circumstances. Barth’s thought is not only descriptive but provides a way to think normatively about a Christian approach to political life. Perhaps his most important 1946 political essay, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” remains a vitally important essay in thinking theologically about the relationship between church and state. It was this essay that led John Howard Yoder to say that Barth remains the quintessential post-Christendom and post-Constantinian theologian. Because Barth seeks to distinguish and relate (rather than identify or synthesize) the civil and church communities, both the civil and Christian communities give *witness* to Christ’s rule. On one side, the church “reminds” the state of its function, purpose, and hope, and on the other, the civil community is not only a guardian of the common good, but also a *witness* to peacemaking and justice. Barth writes: “[T]he true community of Jesus Christ is

the society in which it is given to men to see and understand the world as it is, to accept solidarity with it, and to be pledged and committed to it.” Indeed, he adds, “the Church as the true community exists essentially for the world and may thereby be known as the true Church” (CD IV/3, 780). The world, generally speaking, does not know that it has been reconciled to God, which is the power and source of all peace, justice, and freedom. This is why the civil community *needs* the church, as the true witnessing community. Still, the church must be true to its witness, which does not offer a political program or strategy as much as a set of beliefs and practices that give witness to God’s kingdom.

Therefore, unlike Rasmusson, I see a direct line running throughout Barth’s writings that remains committed to the peacemaking function of the state, while allowing on rare and exceptional occasions for war. Only in very unusual circumstances should the church and civil communities support war, such as in the case of self-defense, assisting a weaker neighbor, and as a last resort to preserve one’s community. Yet, we must ask: is this inconsistent with practical pacifism, or is it a residual deconstructed just war theory? This tension in Barth’s thought remains at the center of Rasmusson’s critique, as well as others such as the pacifist thought of Yoder and just war thought of Oliver O’Donovan. Yet, is this argument misplaced? Are pacifism and just war the only two options? Is another position that dialectically moves between the two possible? If so, then Barth’s practical pacifism remains a third option. For Barth, being a “practical pacifist,” implies two things: 1) a “Christian concern for the fashioning of true peace among nations to keep war at bay”; and 2) a “Christian concern for peaceful measures and solutions among states to avert war” (CD III/4, 460). These two principles of “active peacemaking” and “averting war” provide a common vision for peacemaking for the church and civil community, and provide an alternative to the extremes of a “post-Constantinian theology of war” and the “absolutism of the pacifist thesis” (CD III/4, 460). By shifting the focus toward the active commitment of peacemaking, and suspending arguments for the state’s use of force, practical pacifism moves away from justifications for “just war” and toward practical strategies for implementing justice and peace. Christian witness to peacemaking remains non-ideological and practical. Barth’s position on peacemaking and war is very similar to what is today called the “just peacemaking” theory, which stands between the just war and pacifist traditions. By affirming this view, we can say there are three positions—not two—in Christian ethics, namely the just war and pacifist positions, but also the

mediating position of “just peacemaking.” Christians who support just peacemaking are more concerned with discussion about how to “prevent war” than whether war ought to be seen as just or unjust. However, when war actually starts, the peacemaking “mediating” position is interrupted by the reality of war, which forces Christians to either be for or against the current war. At this point, one may draw upon the just war theory, not in its gross misuse that justifies unjust political power and violence, but in its proper use, as a form of Christian witness to justice and peace. At that point, Christians are free to draw from both the just war and pacifist traditions in evaluating the current conflict, with the goal of ending the conflict and returning to their presumption for peacemaking. This “peacemaking” position, furthermore, is not just a theory but is often reflected in the numerous ecclesial documents or statements on peacemaking. It’s a position that echoes the Barmen Declaration’s claim that we live in a world that is reconciled, which makes justice and peace possible, but we also live in a world “not yet redeemed” in which the political power of leviathan seeks to rule.

Book Reviews

Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism. Edited by Bruce L. McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6656-1. Pp. viii + 387. \$38.00 Paperback.

Several recent volumes have sought to bring Barth’s theology into constructive and critical dialogue with evangelicalism. While the present volume fits into this category, it sets itself apart from the others in being focused, largely, upon Reformed and Presbyterian accounts of evangelicalism and of Cornelius Van Til’s critique of Barth and the “New Modernism” in particular. Fourteen chapters, plus an introduction and an afterword, are organised into three parts: first, historical context; second, philosophical and theological analysis; and third, contemporary trajectories. With one exception, the essays in this volume were first presented at the second annual conference on Karl Barth’s theology cosponsored by the Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary and the Karl Barth Society of North America, which took place on June 22-24, 2007. The aim of the conference, and of this volume, is threefold: first, to re-examine the critique of Barth by one of his most vocal opponents, Van Til; second, to lay some foundations for what the conveners hope will be a new phase in evangelical engagement with Barth; and third, to examine how Barth’s theology might

help evangelicals in their efforts to come to grips with contemporary theological movements (“Introduction,” 1).

While the theme and arrangement of the volume as a whole is well thought out, as with most edited works this one is uneven in its treatment of Van Til, evangelicalism, and bringing Barth into dialogue with both. Chapter One by George Harinck is at the same time a fascinating yet languid and even repetitive essay introducing the criticisms Van Til had of Barth’s theology. It has little to do with evangelicalism and more to do with neo-Calvinism. The essay does, however, lay a foundation in Van Til’s critique for what follows. Darrell Hart’s essay, Chapter Two, is erudite and well written, and typically critical of evangelicalism. Hart writes as an OPC insider and construes the material (rightly or wrongly) to that discussion and context. The topic of his chapter is the battle for the Bible which provides an account of the selective reception of Barth’s views by neo-evangelicals.

Part Two has four sections with two essays in each: philosophy, Christology, ecclesiology, and universalism. This forms one of the most interesting parts of the volume. John Hare and Clifford Anderson deal with philosophical issues. Hare provides an initial sketch of the Kantian presuppositions in Barth’s work in light of recent scholarship, and as such, brings the reader up to date with recent accounts. It shows the ways in which Kant has been misunderstood and how Barth has been misunderstood as a result. Anderson’s chapter also takes up the topic of Kant’s influence on Barth, specifically Karl Barth and the transcendental argument. Anderson’s essay is an extension of Hare’s, yet longer, more formal, and less stimulating.

The next two essays deal with Barth’s Christology and both offer critical, insightful, and informative readings of his theology. In the first essay, Michael Horton examines again Barth’s doctrine of election, offering a gracious reading of Barth while rejecting it at many points. In this essay we have a federal Calvinist critique of Barth’s ideas on covenant, election, and incarnation and forms, in part, a series of questions over Bruce McCormack’s interpretation of Barth’s doctrine of election. In the final analysis Horton advises theologians to do what Barth did and return to the older wells of Reformed Orthodoxy as we seek to bear witness to God in the world. Adam Neder next examines Barth’s doctrine of the hypostatic union, specifically how Barth “actualizes” the incarnation. Neder asks a number of crucial questions about Barth’s Christology without seeing the need to defend him at every turn. There is little here, however, which

relates to the theme of the volume as a whole.

Kimlyn Bender and Keith L. Johnson provide essays on Barth’s ecclesiology, and both are directly on point in terms of the goals and themes of the volume as a whole. Bender is the first in the volume to clearly identify and define the term “evangelical” before examining three themes: criticism, contribution, and consensus between Barth and evangelicalism. He presents his essay as a real dialogue between what Barth might say to evangelicals, what evangelicals might say to Barth, and what both might learn from the other. This is one of the clearest and most compelling essays of the volume which provokes and invites further discussion. Likewise, Johnson’s essay directly relates to the theme of the volume and does so in an invigorating way. Johnson frames his discussion around Frances Beckwith’s move from being the ETS President to Roman Catholicism. Adopting Barth’s account of the *concursum Dei* he focuses his essay on water baptism, using Barth to reclaim for evangelicals an account of divine and human agency. He finally returns to an actualistic ecclesiology, where the activity of witness is understood as the being of the Church. Both essays challenge, disrupt, and then constructively suggest ways in which Barth and evangelicals may learn from each other.

The next pair of essays focuses on universalism, which is a sticking point for evangelicals. Bruce McCormack re-enters debates over Barth’s supposed universalism and attempts to provide a comprehensive report. Marshalling evidence from Barth’s works and from a quick analysis of Paul’s theology, McCormack presents Barth as a hopeful universalist and suggests all evangelicals should also adopt such a stance. But that is different from other forms of universalism which work with deterministic force. For McCormack we ought to hope and pray for the salvation of all, but it is not something we can teach. Barth is here held up as the model of such an approach. Suzanne McDonald follows McCormack’s essay with a pneumatological questioning of Barth’s doctrine of election, and she finds Barth wanting at several points. While universalism may be a problem to evangelicals it is not *the* problem in Barth’s theology, she contends. The problem of Barth’s doctrine of election stems from his Christology, and in turn his doctrine of the Trinity. Using John Owen as a prototypical Reformed thinker who adopts a filioque-shaped pattern of individual double predestination, McDonald sees parallels between the two but then notes one major (and fatal) difference: to be “in Christ” for Owen requires the Holy Spirit, but not for Barth—Christ does it all. In short, one can be elect without the Spirit, according to Barth, but that is not the case in

Reformed Orthodoxy and evangelical thought, where the Holy Spirit is essential. On this basis McDonald critiques Barth's "soteriological objectivism." This is the most probing of the essays in the volume and one that will, perhaps, create the most discussion regarding Barth's theology for evangelicals.

The final four essays seek to bring Barth's theology into dialogue with recent movements and theologies. Jason Springs provides a summative account of Carl Henry and Hans Frei's debate on historical criticism in order to shed light on Barth's critical realism; John Franke adopts Barth's dynamic, actualistic, and open-ended approach to dogmatics as a resource for the emerging church movement; Kevin Hector brings Barth into conversation with Radical Orthodoxy and sees opportunities for mutual enrichment; and Todd Cioffi analyzes Stanley Hauerwas's use of Barth in his ecclesiology and finds it wanting. He issues a call to evangelicals to look to Barth directly for a way to appreciate Christ's Lordship over the church and the world. An afterword is provided by Bruce McCormack where he seeks to clear up two misunderstandings concerning Van Til's reading of Barth: Barth's use of Kant's epistemology and the relation of revelation to history.

The editors are to be congratulated for their attempt to bring Barth and evangelicals into constructive dialogue, and many, but not all, of the essays in this volume serve that purpose very well. Scholars of Barth will also find much here of interest, especially where the critique of Van Til is concerned. With this volume we have an up-to-date and informed account of those aspects of Barth's theology many evangelicals feel most uneasy about, in a way which may very well reduce such dis-ease. The more evangelical voices of the volume show how Barth may be an ally, albeit with some critical modifications at points. Either way, the volume succeeds admirably in setting the agenda for many a discussion to follow.

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Trinitarian Theology After Barth. Edited by Myk Habets and Phillip Tolliday. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). ISBN: 978-1-60899-490-8 \$46.00. Pp. xviii + 400. Paperback.

This book consists of 16 essays originally delivered at a 2009 symposium in New Zealand by an international group of scholars, with the majority coming from Australia and New Zealand. The editors say this

volume draws from "experts" and "observers" of Barth's thought, which leads them to organize the essays into three categories, namely trinitarian theology "with," "after," and "beyond" Barth. Although this structure is helpful, there are, most basically, two types of essays in the book. First, the majority of essays provide substantive and provocative discussions of Barth's theology, written by both mature and younger scholars in the field of Barth studies. Second, a few essays (some quite short) focus on various topics and may or may not engage Barth as a conversation partner. This review will focus primarily on first set of essays, as they critically engage Barth's trinitarian thought in relation to other aspects of his dogmatic theology.

One useful way to approach this subject is to explore neglected or misunderstood areas of Barth's trinitarian theology, particularly Barth's pneumatology. In response, the essays by Paul Molnar, Antony Glading, and Myk Habets all address issues in Barth's pneumatology. Molnar describes Barth's pneumatology within the framework of human knowledge and divine revelation. Without the agency of the Holy Spirit, who makes it possible for God's self-knowledge (primary objectivity) to become available to human knowledge of God (secondary objectivity), there is no genuine knowledge of God; the Spirit unites persons to Christ and consequently to the Father. Molnar explores how various theologians, including John Courtney Murray, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Elizabeth Johnson, all rely on foundational apologetics as a preliminary rational step in knowing that "God is." This implies that God's revelation, unveiled through God's free act, cannot occur before the human mind prepares itself through a constructive act of knowing that "God is." Against this view, Molnar, relying on Barth and T. F. Torrance, demonstrates how such rational constructions of "God is" *eliminate* the Holy Spirit's agency from the task of revealing who God is objectively — as Trinity. This means, says Molnar, that "any attempt to know 'that God is' that abstracts from 'who God is' as the eternal Trinity will always end in some form of self-justification," which avoids the "need for faith and for exclusive reliance on Holy Spirit from beginning to end" (45). So it is ironic that many of Barth's critics who criticize his negative construal of natural theology and apparent neglect of the Spirit, often make it more difficult to talk about the triune God because they restrict the freedom of the Spirit's agency in revelation and salvation. In a related essay, Myk Habets explores pneumatological themes in the filioque doctrine, finding ways to move forward in ecumenical dialogue. Habets admits we can learn from Barth three things: 1) what problems emerge from the

filioque-monopatrism debate and Barth's solution to the problem; 2) how to reach a fine dialectical balance between essence (*Sein*) and the persons (*Seinsweisen*) without giving ontological priority of one over the other; and 3) the latent "Athanasian parallels" in Barth's theology which remain openings to re-think Barth's filioquism (170-71). In addition to Barth, Habets discusses the filioquism of T. F. Torrance and Thomas Weinandy, with the purpose of finding rapprochement between Western filioquism and Eastern monopatrism. Trinitarian theology, says Habets, "after Barth does not and will not progress in one direction. There is no single path for those working *after* him to follow" (199). This implies that one of the important features of Barth's theology is its dialogical openness to diverse interpretations, and to "eavesdrop" on other viewpoints, enabling theology as a free science to continue. Lastly, Antony Glading explores how a "Christo-pneumatological" understanding of the Spirit's agency, in Jesus Christ, demonstrates the authentic temporality of God's eternity. "It is not that God is authentically in time but that time is authentically in him" (314). Glading replies to a common criticism of Barth, namely that his Christology limits the Spirit's agency to that of the unifier of Father and Son, which collapses the Spirit's agency into Christ's agency. Glading carefully looks at the Christ-Spirit relation in *CD IV/1-3*, and especially the Spirit's role in gathering the Christian community in faith, strengthening the community in love, and sending the community in hope. Christian existence is "being in relation," and consequently it is in the "fellowship of the community, and not the individual, that the work of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled" (328).

Another set of three essays explores tensions within Barth's trinitarian thought or in its relationship to other doctrines, and subsequently raises some controversial issues in Barth studies. Bruce McCormack has for some time insisted that Barth's theology of election in *CD II/2* shapes Barth's subsequent theology, including his later trinitarian thought. At the heart of the debate is this question: does God's trinitarian being constitute his divine act of electing, or, alternatively, does God's self-determination for election constitute God's trinitarian being? If God's election stands logically (not ontologically) prior to God's triunity, then particular aspects of Barth's theology in *CD I/1*, says McCormack, would need imaginative reconstruction. So, on one hand, McCormack admits the "basic structure" of Barth's Trinity as "One Subject and three modes of being" remains unchanged after *CD II/2*, but on the other hand, the later Barth "no longer equates the divine essence with hiddenness, but with the

concrete Subject who is completely given in each of his three modes of being" (111). The "abstract" formulation of God's lordship of *CD I/1* later changes into the "concrete" view, shaped by the self-revelation of Jesus Christ as a historical event, which not only personifies the eternal Son but also the Father and Spirit. There is, in sum, "no triunity in God apart from election, for the two occur in one and the same event" (115). The central issue of debate here among Barth scholars, of which McCormack represents one side, is not whether there is development in Barth's trinitarian thought from *CD I/1* to *CD IV/1*, but whether there is an implicit contradiction between Barth's early and later trinitarian thought that warrants a "reconstruction." Since Barth himself, in *CD IV/1*, instructs the reader to return to *CD I/1* for a fuller discussion of the Trinity, it would imply that he saw his brief discussion of the Trinity in *CD IV/1* as simply a continuation of his earlier thought, albeit "only briefly, selectively, and in a limited way" (*CD IV/1*, 204). Similarly, Benjamin Myers pushes McCormack's argument further by stating "Barth's *Church Dogmatics* includes not one doctrine of the Trinity, but two" (121). Drawing primarily on Rowan Williams' 1979 essay on Barth's trinitarian thought, Myers claims that Barth's trinitarian thought of *CD IV/1* "functions as a critique of the very idea of God." "Jesus is not merely epistemologically significant," says Myers, "he is ontologically significant, as the one who (so to speak) makes God God" (130). In brief, this means that the *Logos asarkos*, without the incarnation, exists as *Deus absconditus*, and that God's "way of being God" comes to light only in the "human history of Jesus" (130). What is being said here? Such a conclusion seems to eliminate any discussion of the immanent Trinity, which eradicates God's freedom to exist within the perichoretic relations of Father, Son, and Spirit. If so, this position does not belong to Karl Barth. In another essay, Philip Tolliday concentrates on paragraph 59 (*CD IV/1*)—"The Obedience of the Son." Tolliday explores this controversial section by saying there is a change in Barth's thought, but one that does not lead to ontological (eternal) subordinationism. Tolliday presumes a corresponding (but not identical) relationship of the immanent to the economic Trinity. Although Barth is no subordinationist, and although Jesus' suffering, humiliation, obedience, and subordination, should not be "read back into the immanent life of the triune God," Tolliday claims these must be viewed as "proper to the intra-trinitarian relations between the Father and the Son and are therefore essential to God" (159). There is, in short, an eternal subordination of the Son, without a doctrine of ontological subordinationism. What does this imply for the historical Jesus' obedience to the Father, within the context of a

“two natures” Christology? Again, the argument ends with this particular section in *CD* IV/1 without returning to other nuanced parts of the *Church Dogmatics* or Barth’s other writings for a more comprehensive and dialectical approach to Barth’s theology.

The subject of God’s attributes are further explored in the essays of Ivor Davidson and Murray Rae. In contrast to McCormack, Myers, and Tolliday, Davidson challenges the idea of God’s ontological actualism, and claims that God’s immanent trinitarian being logically stands prior to God’s decision of election. This claim rests on Davidson’s study of divine light as it pertains to the doctrine of God’s aseity. In contrast to Barth’s critics who claim that in *CD* I/1, Barth “devalues world history or human creaturehood,” Davidson claims that Barth’s theology presents “God’s unfathomably loving and free commitment of himself to live his triune life with others, to utter the concrete decree that *is* Jesus Christ” (57-8). Davidson admits that Barth’s doctrine of election in *CD* II/2 shaped his subsequent theology, but this does not imply (as McCormack does) that “God’s being-in-act is ever, for Barth, a divine decision to be triune in anticipation of such fellowship” (58). In a related essay, Rae points to the historical confusion over the idea of “non-spatiality” (immensity) as applied to God’s being. The dangers of non-spatiality as applied to God rests upon the fundamental error of projecting a conception of space derived from human experience into God. In contrast, Barth begins with God’s self-determination to be a threefold differentiation within a perichoretic communion of love as Father, Son, and Spirit. “As God has space for himself, for the triune communion that constitutes his own life, so he creates space for us” (85). In God’s trinitarian unveiling, we see the true reality of space as a triune spaciousness that God creates “in accordance with God’s disclosure in space and time of his eternal being as Father, Son, and Spirit” (79). Like Davidson, Rae speaks about God’s attributes within the context of God’s triune perichoretic relations as Father, Son, and Spirit, as immanent Trinity. The immanent Trinity does not become absorbed into the actualism of the economic Trinity, but remains a space of “personal distinction and communion” (85). Indeed, the risen Christ exists in this space, of distinction and communion, which also exists eternally for us “when our earthly lives have come to an end” (86).

Although placed in the “after” category, the essays by John McDowell, Andrew Burgess, and Adam McIntosh all address specific aspects of Barth’s theology. John McDowell contrasts Barth to Vincent

Brümmer on the topic of prayer. Brümmer’s account of prayer is shaped less by a trinitarian account of God’s agency, than by a more psychologically-inspired conversational model of personal relations. Both “God” and “prayer” for Brümmer remain too abstract, thus separated, from God’s own trinitarian agency. “Brümmer’s ‘one’ is an objectification of God largely though projecting post-Enlightenment understandings of persons as selves.” That is, it results in a “real immanentism—God as categorically present to human understanding as being ‘person’ and thus distinctively like items in the intermundane” (267). In discussing Barth’s view of prayer and divine personhood, McDowell draws from a variety of Barth’s writings, but principally from *CD* I/1, which poses a challenge to any account of prayer that reduces God to a conversational subject or alternatively to a transcendent object. In another essay, McIntosh uses Barth’s trinitarian theology as a critical argument of support for an open-ended or “radically particularized ecclesiology” (239). McIntosh uses Barth’s language of appropriation to argue for a “hermeneutic of incompleteness” about what we can and cannot say about the particular agencies of the Father, Son, and Spirit. This framework, then, assists the author in critiquing “blueprint ecclesiologies.” In a similar ecclesiological trajectory, Andrew Burgess concentrates on soteriology from the standpoint of Barth’s trinitarian theology. Burgess demonstrates how Barth’s soteriology involves a movement from God toward humanity and humanity toward God, both of which are actualized in Jesus Christ as the elector and elected. Saying this, however, Burgess is careful not to collapse soteriology into Christology, but insists that the “work of Jesus is the work of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (209). God’s salvific agency remains trinitarian, and once the Trinity is denied, there is only modernist talk about “symbol and myth” in which “humans are to be the agents of their own ascent to God” (219).

As stated in the beginning, a second group of essays “after” or “beyond” Barth” seek to focus on various topics and may or may not use Barth as a conversation partner. Andrew Nichol, for example, examines Robert Jenson’s discussion of finitude and death. Briefly mentioning Barth, Nichol argues that Jenson’s soteriology remains too eschatological—an entirely futuristic event in which ontology becomes absorbed into soteriology. Indeed, Jenson absorbs the language of sin’s judgment into God’s judgment of grace, which means that death ultimately remains a sign of God’s grace and love of the “infinite eschatological community of the triune God” (252). In another essay, Hayden Nelson claims that God’s impassibility and immutability ought to be understood as an “active

constancy" rather than the metaphysically-laden abstraction of God's changelessness and passive transcendence. Again drawing on perichoretic language, says Nelson, "God is active in that he is touched by suffering, yet is constant in that he is not overwhelmed or ontologically shaped by suffering" (343). The Father and the Spirit relationally experience the Son's suffering but not identically as the Son himself experiences it. Although Nelson does not refer to Barth in depth, his essay explores a topic that would be enriched with further study in Barth's theology.

Nicola Hoggard-Creegan's short essay on *vestigium Trinitatis* describes various triadic analogies from biology, natural sciences, human relations theory, and semiotic accounts of unity and diversity. Dismissing Barth's criticism of natural theology, she further argues that an apologetic theology of *vestigium Trinitatis* is needed to challenge the materialism and atheism of much contemporary thought. In so doing, however, she avoids addressing potential challenges to the veracity of these triadic apologetics. Another essay by Ulrike Link-Wieczorek seeks to take trinitarian theology seriously as a "thick description" of God, but also points to the pitfalls of this doctrine in the task of interreligious dialogue. The Trinity is relevant for such discussions, not about the being of God, but as a rule that marks out the boundaries of Christian theology and expresses the Christian vision or experience of the mystery of God. Unlike the previous two authors, Ashley Moyse discusses Barth's trinitarian thought, and particularly how Barth's account of *perichoresis* can be used as a model for a methodology in Christian biomedical ethics. The economic trinity is linked with the ethical theories of deontology (Reconciler), teleology (Creator), and existential ethics (Redeemer), which then can be used as a framework for biomedical ethics.

In summary, there are some excellent essays in this book, but similar to other volumes based on conference proceedings, its limitations are based on what remains missing. The book does have a foreward by John Webster, but no comprehensive introduction, nor an article providing a comprehensive overview of Barth's trinitarian theology. There is an interesting array of theological topics explored in the book, but there is no comprehensive structure that explores how trinitarian theology has changed since Barth's time, and how Barth's thought remains a current conversation partner in light of these changes. Most obviously, this is a book for Barth scholars. The most interesting essays in the book are the ones that focus on current issues of debate in Barth studies, particularly as they relate God's being and act, the

immanent and economic trinity. Although there are essays on pneumatology and Christology, there is little about God as Father or the Father-Son, Father-Spirit, Father-Covenant/Creation relations; there is little discussion of CD III/1-4 and the CD IV/4 fragments (*The Christian Life*). Moreover, there's little discussion about how Barth's theology relates to theological anthropology, Social Trinitarianism, or the concrete (or local) church. There is also little discussion of Barth's place within the ecclesial divergences in trinitarian theology, both Eastern and Western, as well as historical divergences in Patristic, Reformation, or Modern (or postmodern) theology. Putting these limitations aside, however, this book does have some excellent essays that ought to be studied for their appropriation of Barth in relation to topics in trinitarian theology.

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NOTICE

Anyone who may have left behind a book at the last meeting of the KBSNA in Chicago is urged to contact the Editor as soon as possible.

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